



SAMPLE MATERIAL

Students' Essays: I Want to Be Like Her

January 2008

Topic: Encouraging Girls in Math and Science

Practice: Female Role Models

Elizabeth City State University presents the Sonia Kovalevsky Day Celebration of Women in Mathematics as part of university outreach efforts to encourage girls in math. Events are sponsored by the National Security Agency (NSA), NASA, and the Association of Women in Mathematics (AWM). In the essay competition, middle school and high school girls are invited to submit short essays about female role models in math. As a first step, students review biographies of female scientists at the sites below:

<http://quest.nasa.gov/women/WON.html>

<http://www.math.buffalo.edu/mad/PEEPS/womenpeeps.html>

<http://www.awm-math.org/biographies.html>

<http://www.awm-math.org/ctcbrochure/toc.html>

After reviewing the biographies, students select one person, specify her name, occupation, and where she works and compose a one-page essay about why they would like to be like this person. Two reviewers read each essay and select the best five. In reviewing these essays, special attention is given to the way girls express their commitment and interest in majoring in math, and their level of identification with the role model.

Students' Essays: I Want to Be Like Her

Rebecca Gregory, 10th grade, Camden High School

Her name: Shirley Mathis McBay

Occupation: President of her company

Employer or department where she works: Quality Education for Minorities

Shirley Mathis McBay, in my opinion, is a motivating force to me. In school, I am often teased because of my desire to learn. I am seen as strange because I'm a tenth grader in pre-calculus and chemistry, and I have a dream of going to the North Carolina School of Science and Math. When I read McBay's story, I was instantly touched. It seemed to me when she was in school she was treated the same way I am. Then, when I read that she had a Ph.D. in mathematics and has led many endeavors in science and math, it made me feel as if I could face any adversary and achieve my goal of becoming a neurosurgeon. After reading McBay's story, I feel as if anything is possible. So, as my final word, I want to be like Shirley Mathis McBay so I can fight adversity to achieve my goals.

Rachel Baker, 7th grade, Williamston Middle School

Her name: Susan J. Helms

Occupation: NASA Astronaut

Employer or department where she works: NASA

I want to be like her because as dangerous as her job is, she has logged more than 800 hours in space. That's over 33 days! I've always thought being an astronaut would be cool, making history and all. Susan J. Helms is also known for many awards. She's a very experienced astronaut to have won that many awards. Hard work is important to succeed in anything in life, and I think Susan J. Helms has got that character trait beyond the shadow of a doubt.

To be a NASA astronaut you have to go to college and get a degree in aeronautical engineering. That involves perseverance to stay in school that long! She must have worked really hard.

I hope when I grow up that I am as well-rounded as her. That's why I aspire to be like her.

Chauncey Bowder, 8th grade, River Road Middle School

Her name: Judith A. Resnik

Occupation: Astronaut

Employer or department where she works: RCA and NASA

Dr. Resnik was a tremendous woman!!! I would love to be like her, not because she was an astronaut, but because she committed great acts to break the barrier against women during her time. She was born on April 5, 1949 in Ohio. She graduated from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1970. She was an employee of RCA where she was a design engineer. She finished her training with NASA in August of 1979. She was granted the successful flight of STS 41-D in 1984. Despite her death during the explosion of STS-51-1, Challenger, Judith A. Resnik, I would most definitely say, accomplished her goal!!!

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Krishna Patel, 11th grade, Williamston High School

Her name: Denise Stephenson-Hawk

Occupation: Math modeling of Atmospheric & Oceanic Studies

Employer or department where she works: AT&T Bell Lab; National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Denise Stephenson-Hawk was born in a small town in NC just like me. My birthplace was in a small, poor town of Williamston. Despite growing up in a segregated environment where blacks (minorities) were not accepted and privileged like whites, she studied hard and created her identity. Being a minority myself, I would like to succeed like her. I want to become a radiologist by creating an identity like Stephenson. Denise Stephenson left her mark and wanted to strive to surpass others. She achieved her masters degree from George Washington University. After, she went on to get her Ph.D. from Princeton in atmospheric and oceanic studies. This accomplishment made her the first minority to achieve such a high standard. I would like to set standards high like hers to push myself to accomplish a goal. She knew she could do it and she did. I strongly believe in women and minority achievements like her. To achieve education in one of the best universities and work in a national institute at the time period in which she lived (segregation) was remarkable. I would like to be a role model to others like Stephenson became for me.

Heather Meiggs, 12th grade, Camden County High School

Her name: Debbie Schenberger

Occupation: Mechanical Engineer

Employer or department where she works: NASA at CAD Workstation

Debbie Schenberger had to overcome many hardships while growing up. Many people urged her to stay away from mathematics and denied her literature on math. Even her parents didn't believe in her. She overcame all these obstacles and went on to study engineering. She was the only girl in her senior engineering class.

Like Debbie, currently I am the only girl in my physics class and everyone thinks I'm out of my mind to be a girl and want to study chemical engineering. She balanced a family, career, and a life. Even though I have just read about her she has touched me deeply. It is women like her who changed the working force for women all over the world.